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In the Claims

What is claimed is:

1.   (Currently Amended) A method to remotely permit use of resident software options comprising the steps of:

(A) receiving an access request from a user of a remotely located client-device seeking access to an option resident in memory of the remotely located client-device;

(B) determining whether to grant limited access to the option of the remotely located client-device in response to the access request when a set of criteria has been met;

(C) generating an electronic enabler configured to permit access to the option in response to an access grant;

(D) transmitting the electronic enabler to the remotely located client-device; and

(E) automatically enabling customer access to the option in the remotely located client-device in response to reception of the electronic enabler.

2.   (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of monitoring use of the option and providing a warning of an expiration of the access grant.

3.   (Original) The method of claim 2 further comprising monitoring one of a number of uses and a time period, wherein an expiration of either is used to automatically terminate access to the option after providing the warning.

4.   (Original)   The method of claim 2 further comprising the step of automatically transmitting a renewal access request, and allowing extension of the access grant without interruption of access to the option, wherein terms of the renewal access request are consistent with terms of the previous access grant.

5.   (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising granting a license when access is approved and wherein access to the option automatically terminates upon license expiration.

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6.   (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of granting limited access on a pay-per-use period.

7.   (Original) The method of claim 6 wherein the pay-per-use period comprises one of a fixed time period, particular days in a week, and particular times of a day.

8.   (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the set of criteria comprise:
       validating customer identification;
       validating system identification;
       determining an option; and
       determining a pay-per-use method.

9.   (Original) The method of claim 1 further including the step of receiving the access request at a centralized facility from a remote user via a public communication interface.

10.   (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein steps (A)-(E) are entirely automated at a centralized facility.

11.   (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of receiving an access request further includes the steps of:
       receiving a customer identifier from a customer; and
       validating the customer via the customer identifier.

12.   (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein the step of validating the customer via the customer identifier includes the steps of:
       retrieving a customer status of the customer;
       denying the access request if the customer status is unqualified; and
       granting the access request if the customer status is qualified.

13.   (Original) The method of claim 12 wherein a customer status of unqualified includes one of a delinquent account, an exhausted line of credit, a poor credit history, and a

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refusal to complete educational requirements and a customer status of qualified includes a non-delinquent account.

14.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the <u>remotely located client-</u>device is a medical imaging scanner.

15.   (Original) An access granting system comprising:

a device having at least one disabled option resident on a computer programmed to control the device;

a centralized facility located remotely from the device and having at least one access computer programmed to:

receive from a qualified customer a request to access and use the disabled option; and

grant access and use, on a pay-per-use basis, of the disabled option for a predetermined time period.

16.   (Original) The system of claim 15 wherein the at least one access computer programmed to:

determine a customer qualification status;

deny the request if the customer status is unqualified; and

grant the request if the customer status is qualified.

17.   (Original) The system of claim 16 wherein an unqualified customer status includes an unfavorable billing status and a qualified customer status includes a favorable billing status.

18.   (Original) The system of claim 15 wherein the at least one access computer is further programmed to generate an electronic enabler and transmit the electronic enabler to the device.

19.   (Original) The system of claim 15 wherein the at least one access computer is further programmed to:

transmit an enabling software key to the device from the centralized facility;

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verify option access in the device; and

send a verification message to the customer confirming access.

20. (Original) The system of claim 15 wherein at least one access computer is further programmed to send an electronic verification of receipt of the access request.

21. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 15 wherein the device includes at least one medical imaging scanner.

22. (Original) The system of claim 15 wherein the customer is denied access to the disabled option after expiration of a pay-per-use period.

23. (Original) The system of claim 22 wherein a computer of the device monitors access to the resident option and provides a warning of an expiration of customer access to the resident option prior to the expiration of an access grant.

24. (Currently Amended) A computer data signal embodied in a carrier wave and representing a sequence of instructions which, when executed by at least one processor, causes the at least one processor to:

receive at a centralized facility an access request from a user to request access to an option resident in a remote client-device;

determine whether the user is qualified, and if so:

grant limited access to the option resident in the remote client-device;

generate a software key designed to allow limited access to the option;

send the software key to the client-device; and

enable limited access by a user to the option.

25. (Original) The computer data signal of claim 24 wherein the sequence of instructions embodied in the signal include further instructions to transmit a renewal access request consistent with terms of a previous grant of limited access.

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26.   (Original) The computer data signal of claim 24 wherein the sequence of instructions embodied in the signal includes further instructions to deny access to the option upon expiration of the limited access grant.

27.   (Original) The computer data signal of claim 24 wherein the sequence of instructions embodied in the signal includes further instructions to send the software key via one of a private communication interface and a public communication interface.

28.   (Original) The computer data signal of claim 24 wherein the sequence of instructions embodied in the signal includes further instructions to:

receive a user identifier;

validate the user identifier;

generate a billing status of the user;

deny the access request if the billing status is unfavorable; and

grant the licensing request with if the billing status is favorable.

29.   (Currently Amended) The computer data signal of claim 24 wherein the client-device is a medical imaging scanner.

30.   (Original) The computer data signal of claim 24 wherein the software key is embedded with data that controls an expiration period of the option.

31.   (Currently Amended) The computer data signal of claim 24 wherein the software key provides access to one or more options in the client-device.